



TO A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER, A SISTER, A WIFE ...

Shana Horton, a senior at Meridian High School, is shown with Capt. Melissa Brady of 186th Air Refueling Wing of the Mississippi Air National Guard. Shana wanted to show her appreciation for women in the military. Here's what she wrote: "I have noticed that female soldiers haven't received the same amount of media attention as male soldiers. However, I think you are all the bravest and strongest women in America. You all surrendered your life and family in order to protect this country — and I and many others commend you on such a great act of patriotism. Every time I see a female soldier at Bonita Lakes Mall, or at an MHS football game, I just want to give her a huge hug and tell her 'thank you.' Although you all are not here physically, your spirit still exists in the smiles and laughs of those who know you best. My hat goes off to very female soldier who is risking her life in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. I just want to say 'THANK YOU, THANK YOU and THANK YOU.'"

PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

Stu's big, fat Christmas surprise

Liz Coats Bosarge is the wife of Master Sgt. Stu Bosarge, who has been a U.S. Marine for 22 years. Liz worked at Coats and Coats Personnel Consultants and the Threefoot Deli while she lived in Meridian. She chaired the Meridian Downtown Christmas Parade and was a radio personality.

She wrote this story in December from her new home in San Diego, Calif. — anxiously awaiting the day when "Stu can kiss the ground of the good ole USA."

That day has now arrived. Stu was scheduled to return home to California on Feb. 22. He and Liz plan to visit friends and family in the Meridian area from March 5-20.

By Liz Coats Bosarge
special to The Star

Playing a joke on someone in Iraq while they are fighting for our country may not seem very funny, but when the joke involves sending Stu Bosarge of Scooba a Santa suit and enough presents for his entire Avionics Division, it is OK.

That's just what several friends and family members from Meridian and all over the country decided to do.

Master Sgt. Oscar Stuart Bosarge Jr. is stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and deployed to Iraq. Marines are a very special group of Patriots. Taking care of each other has many different ways of showing itself.

Stu's "cousin," U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Michael Hopkins, from Johnson City, Tenn., had never met Stu. Michael had been in Iraq for nearly a year, and was getting ready to go home when he heard that Stu was being sent to Iraq.

Michael managed to find Stu before he shipped home and they were able to spend a few days together. When Michael got to Camp Pendleton, he conspired with me to play a joke on Stu.

"We just need to do what every good Marine should do — take care of his fellow Marines," Michael said.

Setting up the joke

It all started about Nov. 1, 2004. First, Stu needed a Christmas tree. When it arrived, the guys in the Avionics Division could barely contain their excitement.

Of course, Stu made them wait until the day after Thanksgiving to set it up. Just because they are in Iraq does not mean that traditions go out the window!

So, they waited.

In the meantime, Stu's friends and relatives in Meridian were busy putting



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A TASTE OF HOME

The U.S. Marines of Helicopter Marine Light Attack 169 Avionics Division celebrated Christmas in Iraq with a tree, ornaments and lots of presents sent by friends and family in The States. Master Sgt. Stu Bosarge is the half-buried guy in the middle, the one in the Santa suit.

the presents together. We did ask Stu what he thought a good gift would be and we decided to send Mach III razors and T-shirts with a company logo on them. The guys get kind of tired of wearing the same uniform every day.

An e-mail was sent out to Stu's friends and relatives to see if they wanted to take part in the Christmas surprise.

All you had to do was ask ...

The response to the e-mail was overwhelming! Seane Walters at Vital Care asked many of her friends to donate T-shirts and got enough together for each Marine.

Even Seane's sister, Sherri, from Apple Valley, Calif., sent a box. Seane also sent her husband, Carl, to Wal-Mart to pick up a Christmas ornament for every Marine to hang on the tree. And he got donations of T-shirts, wrist bands, pens and ball caps from Budweiser and Miller Lite.

Lisa Temple sent several T-shirts from her company, Sign Plant. The American Cancer Society, Coca Cola Company and several radio stations sent T-shirts, all of whom are represented in Iraq from Meridian.

Many other friends and family members like Regina Bosarge Thompson, and Donna Costello, Margarite Howell and Mike Heath from Century 21, Howell Realty, and Lela Coats Linnenkohl and her family of seven children from

Seattle, Wash., and Linda Linne and her family from Pensacola, Fla., sent the razors and lots of goodies like socks and cookies and snacks. Courtney Horton from Cuba, Ala., sent a box, and Joan Kars from St. Louis, Mo., sent some razors too.

Christmas arrivals

In Iraq, the boxes started piling in. They came from Stu's Dad, Stuart Bosarge, and his wife, Debbie Bosarge, in Baton Rouge, La.

Stu's former-military friends sent four huge boxes of stuff they felt would be "things the guys would need." Friends of Stu's sister and brother-in-law, Tim and Angela Myers, and their company, Georgia Pacific, in Pennington, Ala., sent some boxes. Roy Hurst sent some "True Meaning of Christmas" pamphlets from Berachah Church in Houston, Texas.

They kept coming but Stu was not to open any of the boxes marked with a heart until the No. 1 box came. That was the box with the instructions in it, and the Santa suit!

The big day

Needless to say, Stu made an excellent Santa and all the

guys in the Avionics Division of HMLA 169 got around the Christmas tree and sang carols on Christmas Day.

They read the story about how Jesus Christ was born 2004 years ago in a little town not far from where they were celebrating — that He was born to be the savior of the world so that mankind might have eternal life by believing in Him through Faith alone. They told stories about their favorite Christmas memories from home and wished they could be there.

So, a big huge thank-you goes out to all the people in Meridian and other parts of the country who helped with these special gifts.

The friends and family of Stu Bosarge thank you! The U.S. Marines of Helicopter Marine Light Attack 169 Avionics Division send a great big thank-you from Iraq.

And from Stu in Iraq: "Please do not lose sight of why we are here and that we need to continue until victory is attained and freedom is given to the people of Iraq. As bad as you may think and hear from the media, about things that are going on here, God truly blesses us through every step and breath. Peace and Freedom through Military Victory ... 'Whoty Who!'"



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

CONTROL TOWER

Senior Airman Matthew R. Miller and Sgt. Carla Dionne Mayberry man the air traffic control tower at Meridian Regional Airport. Both are members of the 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron, whose members manage both military and civilian flights in Meridian.

'I'm eager to face challenges unknown'

Senior Airman Matthew R. Miller is a member of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron at Key Field. He deployed to Iraq in January of this year and, if nothing changes, is expected to return home in June. Matthew wrote this story right before he left.

By Matthew Miller
special to The Star

Since the attacks against the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. military has been given a new responsibility and worldwide mission.

Men and women of every branch of the military know that, at a minute's notice, they may be called to serve anywhere in the world in the defense of freedom. This has recently hit very close to home with the deployment of local Guard and Reserve units. Almost everyone is related to, or knows, someone who is currently serving overseas.

My turn to serve has now come. I am an air traffic controller in the 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron, based here in Meridian. I am preparing to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. My job will be to direct and control coalition aircraft and to ensure this is done in a safe and expeditious manner.

For the past two years, I have been trained for this exact purpose — to be a vital member in the global war on terrorism. I feel confident that the training I received has prepared me to face the challenges ahead.

The only thing that training can't prepare you for is the feeling when you know you are on the other side of the world, a stranger in a strange place. I know that I will sorely miss my family and friends but, on the other hand, I look forward to the many friendships that will be forged and the experience that will be gained by this deployment.

I think overall my mood is one of excitement. I'm eager to face challenges unknown and, at the same time, I have some doubts. I am aware of the dangers that lie ahead and stand ready to face them. I am thankful for the ability to serve such a grateful nation and eagerly wait the day that I will return home. Your thoughts and prayers are greatly appreciated.

God Bless America.